

Mr. J. J. J.

THE
STATE OF THE NATION,
WITH RESPECT TO
RELIGION AND MANNERS.

S E R M O N

Preached at UXBRIDGE CHAPEL, *Middlesex*,

On SUNDAY, the 25th of OCTOBER, 1789;

Being the Anniversary of HIS MAJESTY's Accession to the Throne.

By the Rev. WALTER HARPER, *A.M.* and Lecturer.

R.

Wickedness exalteth a Nation, but Sin is a reproach to any People.

L O N D O N.

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I. SAMUEL, XII. 7.

*Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you
before the Lord, of all the righteous acts of the Lord
which he did to you and to your fathers.*

IT was a favourite method of instruction with the Jewish legislators, doctors, and prophets, to recur to the history of the nation, and refer to ancient events, to the righteous acts which the Lord had done "their
"fathers," and also to such as were wrought in a period coeval with themselves, in order to excite a correspondent gratitude, and also a spirit of religious obedience, in the breasts of the people. We would willingly adopt the same plan, if our time would conveniently admit of such an extensive discussion: but as

it will not, we must wave the consideration of those
 “ righteous acts which the Lord has done to our
 “ *fathers,*” and select a few of the most leading and
 conspicuous which *our own eyes* have seen, or which
 we *now* behold ; and for some of which we are called
 upon this day, as Christians and as citizens, to come
 before him and rejoice.

Let us begin with that most righteous and merciful
 act, the blessing of *public Peace*. Whilst “ wars and
 “ rumours of wars” spread and prevail around ; whilst
 “ nation rises against nation, kingdom against kingdom,
 “ and many kingdoms are divided against themselves ;”
 whilst the Old World seems generally convulsed, and
 tottering under those signs and symptoms which denote
 approaching dissolution ; “ the Lord has notwith-
 “ standing given (and as yet continued) unto us the
 “ blessing of *Peace*.” He has compelled those who
 are disposed to be “ *enemies,* to be at peace with us,”
 and

and graciously “established that peace in all our borders.”

“Now therefore stand still, that I may reason with you before the Lord of *this* righteous act which the Lord has done for us.” Have we, as a religious and thinking people, ascribed to the Lord the honour and glory thereof? Or do we retain a grateful remembrance of the signal deliverance he wrought, “when the nations were gathered together against us on every side?” Do we acknowledge the operations of the Divine Justice, in having put that yoke upon their necks which they sought to put upon ours? And do we adore the Divine Mercy for having dried up that red-sea of blood which our long and extensive wars had filled, and which had nearly overwhelmed Prince and People in one common ruin? No, we have not. Instead of being thankful for a deliverance from these merited visitations, we are become vain in our imaginations, and our “foolish hearts are darkened” by

the pride of victory ; “ we forget the things our eyes
 “ have seen,” or else ascribe them to secondary causes,
 —to our policy, our courage, our ingenuity and
 strength, these “ gods of our own making, the work
 “ of men’s hands.” Deluded by this principle, we
 attribute success to our *armies*, but “ forget the Lord
 “ of Hosts ;” we extol the power and superiority of
 our *fleets*, but forget the Ruler of the winds and waves ;
 we magnify and blazon forth our *inexhaustible resources*
 (as we foolishly and profanely call them), but forget
 the great Proprietor of all, “ who gives power to get
 “ wealth, or in a moment humbles the children of
 “ pride.”

Thus have we very distantly departed from God,
 and banished him and his goodness from our thoughts.
 Sceptically renouncing his superintending providence,
 we consider *ourselves* as the “ Gods of the land ;” and
 by our own might we will approach the heights of
 Lebanon, and assume the prerogatives of Heaven : by
 our

our might we vainly suppose political safety, and every project, may be accomplished. But *no*, says God, *not* by your might, nor yet by your power and wisdom which you presumptuously glory in. What availed the *might* of the Assyrian, Persian, Babylonian, and Roman empires, the four greatest that ever the sun beheld, with all their fleets and armies, with all their numerous resources and inexhaustible finances? Or, to bring the matter nearer home, what is become of the *might* of a NEIGHBOURING NATION, which has been the scourge and disturber of all others that surround her almost two hundred years? “How is this ham-
“mer of the whole earth cut asunder and broken, and
“become a desolation among the nations?”

In all these instances we read an awful lecture on the fate of empires, and find that the Prophet's declaration is an axiom in politics as well as in morals—“There
“is *no peace*,” saith God, “unto the wicked.” Swayed and determined by these examples to the adoption of
better

better sentiments, let us universally acknowledge the gracious interference of God in our favour ; let us bless his holy name for it ; let us live according to the holy doctrines and righteous laws of the Prince of Peace, and convert the judgments inflicted on other nations into seasonable admonitions to our own. By doing so, we place the Deity on his throne, and ourselves (where we ought to be) at his footstool ; and when “ the Lord is thus their King and Protector, the multitude of the isles may be glad thereof.” Our isle has great reason to be glad, and offer him a constant tribute of seraphic praise for the abundance of peace it enjoys ; and therefore “ not unto us, not unto us, but unto his name, be that praise ascribed.”

Another “ righteous act which the Lord has done to us,” is the bestowing of *National Prosperity*. One blessing generally introduces another, and this is the consequence of *peace* ; for “ our swords are now turned into ploughshares, and our spears into pruning-hooks :

“ hooks :” our fleets, instead of carrying the engines of destruction, are now fraught with the “ stores of “ the merchant,” and convey to us from all quarters of the world “ the peculiar treasures of Kings and the “ provinces.” Agriculture has also liberally supplied us with the blessings of Autumn, and “ filled our garners “ with all manner of store.” In short, “ the riches “ of the earth, and the abundance of the sea,” are profusely poured into our laps.

Let me then “ reason with you before the Lord, on “ these righteous acts which he has done to us.” Do we enjoy the productions of foreign climes with a grateful heart, or import with them pride and folly, and render them instrumental to our lusts? Or when “ the “ *vallies* (which lately was the case) stood so thick “ with corn, as,” in the prophetic language, apparently “ to laugh and sing;” when “ all the trees of the “ wood (clothed in their richest verdure) seemed to “ rejoice before the Lord;” when the birds joined
. their

their cheerful celebrations to the general harmony, and
 “ the cattle on a thousand hills” lowed their responsive strains of gratitude for a season of plenty :—Did we, for whom these blessings were principally intended, bring our tribute of praise to “ the Lord of
 “ the harvest, for crowning the year with his goodness ?” Did we offer up “ our reasonable services,” and leave a liberal portion behind for the “ poor of the
 “ land ?” Or did we (as I fear was almost universally the case) dedicate one part to *covetousness*, and the other to *pride* and *luxury*, and say within our hearts, “ Now,
 “ soul, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry ?”

By an abuse of these things the tables of many are become a snare to take themselves withal. “ Having
 “ eaten and become full ; having built goodly houses,
 “ and dwelt therein ; and having our silver and our
 “ gold, and all that we have, greatly multiplied and
 “ increased ;” our hearts, instead of being thankful for these blessings, and temperate in the use of them,

are

are by them presumptuously lifted up, and we “for-
“get the Lord our God.” In consequence of this
spirit of self-exaltation, what an army of evils pre-
vail with it! Luxury and excess supersede enjoy-
ment of the things themselves; ostentation has in a
great measure supplanted the true delights of society;
and an emulous superiority in pride and distinction
has contributed materially to the utter annihilation of
simple principles, and almost cut asunder the finer
cords of genuine and sentimental friendship. Actuated,
instead of these, by narrow-minded and selfish pre-
possession, Ambition has been encouraged to erect a
standard under which all orders and descriptions enlist.
The spoils of the Indies, though lodged in the hands
of a few, have disseminated the attractions of splen-
dor; and from the court to the cottage the mania
has visibly extended. In every department of life
(with the exception of but a few individuals), appear-
ances are studied beyond our actual situations: and to
emulate and rival, if not exceed, those who are above

us, is the prevailing folly and fatal characteristic of the times. Our minds, principally occupied in these and other pursuits equally ignoble and unworthy, become enervated, sensual, and degenerate; the solemn and exalted realities that respect God, Religion, and Eternity, and which are the only adequate objects of the soul, are gradually seen to decline; whilst luxury, effeminacy, sinful indulgences, a general contempt of revealed religion, and every confounding contrary to that which is right and reasonable, in a similar proportion are seen to increase. And "Shall I not visit for these things, saith the Lord? shall not my soul be avenged of such a nation as this?" On his own peculiar people, and on every other nation notoriously guilty of such enormities, the phials of his vengeance have been poured. The order of his Providence concerning them all is uniform and clear: first he sends his religion and laws, to make a kingdom happy; and whenever these are disregarded, his judgements immediately succeed. Let us instance this

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in the *Asiatic* world. God first placed man there, and gave him a law to make him happy; and then the Gospel (a clearer and milder dispensation), to make him happier still. The knowledge of God by these means was very generally extended; and the revelation of his will was accompanied with a kind and increasing influence, both in government and in morals. Thus things continued, till Luxury, gaining a footing, insinuated itself into the affections of the multitude, and, by inducing them to "forsake their first love," drew upon them the severest resentments of a jealous and holy God: for even to this day unprincipled tyrants hold their bodies in subjection; the Prince of Darkness retains his empire over their souls; and the ancient venerable ruins of those temples in which the name of the Redeemer was once recorded, and the joyful tidings of his Gospel daily founded forth, present to the eye of reflection an important admonition to *be wise betimes*. The same chain of events, and the same attendant dispensations,

may be pointed out in *Europe* ; but to avoid enlarging beyond the limits we prescribed, let me give you an instance thereof in only *one* of its nations, and that *our nearest neighbour* : as Babylon of old, so “ she sat
 “ delicately arrayed like a queen among the nations ;
 “ her merchants waxed rich through the abundance
 “ of her dainties : and by these and her sorceries
 “ together were all nations of the earth deceived :
 “ but in an hour she is come to nought, and her
 “ delicacies are departed from her.” As our nation has been in habits of procuring them from her in great abundance ; as her maxims, her manners, her pride, her frivolities, her luxuries, and those worst of sorceries, her *Deistical principles*, have been imported with a general and affected avidity ; and as we have moreover purchased them on terms of the most wanton extravagance, we are justly entitled to the benefit of her additional example of the fates of nations ; which, in common with the examples of all others, confirms a very ancient doctrine of Revelation, that
 whenever

whenever *national prosperity* causes a forgetfulness of God, a contempt of religion, and increasing profligacy in the people, that very "prosperity shall slay them." With this declaration, and with these examples of its truth, either recorded in the page of history, or wrought before our eyes, let us hope to perpetuate the great favours and privileges we enjoy by a contrary demeanour, and a more christian deportment than we have hitherto exercised: for the prolongation of our national charter is entirely dependent thereon; and the continuance of national prosperity is solely held by this conditional tenure—"the Lord
 "is with us whilst we are with him; and if we seek
 "him, he will be found of us; but if we forsake him,
 "he will forsake us."

Another "of the righteous acts which the Lord
 "has done to us," is the national establishment of his Religion amongst us. To go no further back into the days of our fathers than the æra of the *Reformation*,
 how

how gloriously did the pure Gospel of Christ ascend above the clouds of superstition ! and what able and zealous professors did God raise up, to plant and establish it amongst us ! It was entrusted to men who, possessing the utmost advantages of learning, sanctified it by prayer, piety, and retirement. The sacred Volume, and the writings of the first Christians, as forming the best comments thereon, were the sources from whence they drew up that form of sound words which every sabbath-day is read in your ears ; and the regulations and discipline of the Apostolic Churches were made the models of our own. The fabric they reared, is to be seen amongst us to this day. Its walls not being built with untempered mortar, with earthly and perishing materials, but with truth and purity, are not in the least decayed ; and being founded upon the sure foundation-stone laid in Zion, on Christ's doctrines, his *divinity*, and laws, neither popery, apostasy, heresy, schism, profaneness, nor even the gates of Hell, have hitherto prevailed against it ! This is the
most

most righteous act, this is the greatest benefit we have yet considered, and one on which the rest depend. Let us therefore “reason a little before the Lord,” on the use we make of it. Do we diligently avail ourselves of the advantages so liberally imparted? Do we *live* according to the righteous doctrines constantly preached and promulgated? Do we punctually attend the ministry of the word, and reverently attend to it as the word of God, which it most certainly is? Do we receive it in the “meekness of wisdom;” reflect much on the expoundings and explanations afforded; “search the Scriptures,” to see if they are actually true; and then apply them to the different states and situations of our mind, accompanied with prayer and invocation of God’s good spirit for an attendant blessing? Few there are but must in these respects plead guilty, and acknowledge their manifold omissions: and for want of attending to this pious and consistent method of learning divinity, men commence students of the sacred science in a

wrong

wrong spirit—a spirit of pride and scepticism. Regarding their reason as an oracle, and their judgement as an infallible test, they reject some parts of the Sacred Writings, and force the most arbitrary constructions on the rest. They expunge out of their creed all the radical doctrines of Christianity, which make it a beautiful and perfect system; they rob Christ of his divinity, sacrilegiously spoil the Gospel of its most essential ornaments, and precipitately destroy what they pretend to reform; namely, the *Reformation* itself. Ashamed of calling it what it virtually is, *Deism*, though in disguise, *Socinianism* is thought a milder appellation:* and as *Infidelity* is an offensive word,
and

* *Deism* is now concealed under cover of *Socinianism*; and *Socinianism* is inculcated under the appellation of *Presbyterianism*!!! This seems to be the ecclesiastical policy of a considerable body of the Dissenters: at least it is so in *Uxbridge*, where I reside, in common with many other places. Surely there must be something very vague, if not *exceptionable*, in those tenets which require a *fictitious* name

and excites alarm, *liberal sentiments*, *free enquiry*, and *new light*, are adopted as phrases that are on the contrary insinuating and attractive. It is a *light* however that, like a deceiving vapour, has led many into all the miseries and inexplicable perplexities of error;

name to render them *admissible*; or to be used as a *lure* to entrap the credulous and undiscerning professor, though by approaches imperceptible to himself, into those snares and labyrinths of error which, were they publicly acknowledged, or their danger clearly understood, would be universally avoided and abhorred. A *coalition* in the *theological* world, between the followers of *Calvin* and *Socinus*, is more strange and unaccountable than any we read of in the *political*. It affords an additional instance of the truth of a remark which observation frequently suggests; that when any "winds of doctrine" blow upon the religious world, those who take their stand at the highest point of *enthusiasm*, are soonest removed from their *reasonable* service, and fall off from the "Tree of Life," thick and wavering as the leaves in autumn! One would scarcely have thought that old Calvin's *sable* coat would ever be plunged into a Socinian *die*; or that any one would undertake to modernise

error; it has drawn them through the rugged paths of *Materialism* to the very borders of *Atheism*: it has also in a great measure extinguished the sacred flame of Christian unity in the professing world, and left no other light, or heat, or comfort, to the heart of man.

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its grotesque and formal shape, and alter it according to the fashions and propensities of refined heathenism. But, such is the taste and enterprise of the age, that the most palpable absurdities are attempted: and, among many others, *words* and *names* which hitherto have had a *clear* and *determinate* meaning, are now used to denote *any thing* which policy or convenience may direct. It therefore cannot be too generally intimated that by the appellation a *MODERN Presbyterian*, is signified one who denies the *Divinity of his Saviour*, his *mediation*, his *atonement*, and *intercession*, in conjunction with many other valuable and comfortable truths which *distinguish* Christianity from Heathenism, and give the *former* a decided preference for the essential purposes of doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. A *CONSISTENT Presbyterian* might now forcibly expostulate with the generality of his *teachers*, and he might say to them very justly: "YOU have taken away my Lord, and I know not where you have laid him."

in return, except it be such as the shining of the moon affords in a frosty night, which leaves all nature cold and dreary as it finds it.* This is the return that some men make the Deity for the establishment of his religion amongst us; and if we reason before the Lord with others who still hold the truth, and the foundation of truth, there is too much cause for reprehension, because it is oftentimes held in unrighteousness of life. It is held in a *lukewarm* and *negligent spirit*, which keeps professors from the *place of worship* on the most trifling occasions, and such as frequently are the result of their own contrivance. This has occasioned a most fatal neglect of *family prayer*

* If the reader wishes to make himself master of the subject, on the orthodox side I would recommend a little Tract, entitled *Jones's Catholic Doctrine of the Trinity*; together with *Waterland's Importance of the Trinity*, *Leslie's Socinian Controversy*, *Bishop Horsley's Tracts in Controversy with Dr. Priestley*; and a Book entitled *Horæ Solitariae*, recently published by Matthews.

prayer and domestic instruction ; it has very unhappily removed that seriousness of thinking which is exercised in *religious retirement* and communion with God : and alas ! what is worse than all, it has induced a very general *profanation* of the SABBATH ; which, from being considered as “ a day of rest, and an holy solemnity to the Lord,” is every where disturbed with “ the noise of the whip, the prancing of the horses, the songs of the drunkard, and the madness of the people.” This day, the religious and abstracted observance of which is the only bank or bulwark against the inroads of secularity, being thus held in contempt, survey the consequences as they appear in what are called the *fashionable circles*, and you will find them to be infidelity, lust, intemperance, pride, and profaneness ; then look at the *lower orders* of the people, and you will behold drunkenness, idleness, poverty, deceit, discontent, dishonesty, blasphemy, and the most brutish ignorance in religion : and were we to extend our observations to the professed haunts
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and receptacles of vice and infamy, we should see still greater abominations than these.

What we have seen and alluded to, are sufficient of themselves to destroy the best *established Church* that ever was set up. They *have* destroyed many. The seven Asiatic Churches have had their candlesticks removed; and the whole power and policy of the Roman Empire were insufficient to protect the Christian Religion, though fully established, against the inroads of heresy and vice.

Awed by these providences, let us (as God counsels the church of Sardis) “be watchful, and strengthen
“the things which remain, and are ready to die;”
let us remember how mercifully and miraculously we
“received them; and let us hold them fast, and
“repent.” Then will the Lord be pleased with our spiritual Zion, with the *Church* he has established
amongst.

amongst us ; he will graciously condescend to be its Defender and Protector ; he will frustrate the most malicious and powerful combinations of its enemies, and raise up *Kings* to be its nursing fathers, and *Queens* its nursing mothers, as we now behold.

And this brings me, in the last place, to speak of another “ righteous act the Lord has done to us,” in blessing us with a Sovereign exactly of this description—*a father* to the church, and *a friend* to his people. [All, in short, that are dependent on his care, are instructed by his example, and maintained in the constitutional enjoyment of their property, their liberty, and laws. The misery or felicity of most other nations turns on the caprice of tyrants, on their arbitrary mandates, or the private interest of their minions ; but the regal sceptre with us is swayed upon principles of public justice : the supplications of the most obscure peasant find ready and gracious admittance to the royal ear ; and as far as the power of one individual can extend to

diffuse

diffuse happiness amongst the many, it is constantly exerted with this benevolent design by our beloved Monarch.

For setting such a one to reign over us, and more especially for restoring him to us when the prevalence of disease had almost silenced the suggestions of hope, the most lively tributes of gratitude should be offered to that Almighty Being in whose hand we all are, and who thereby saved our nation from a state of impending anarchy, and perhaps civil commotion.

Let us therefore "reason a little before the Lord" "on this righteous act which he has done to us," and our conduct respecting it. Did we impute such a signal and seasonable deliverance to the God of all goodness, and offer up the "calves of the lips and the sacrifice of the heart," on that memorable occasion? Have we repented of such sins as have always been the fore-runners of national visitations? And as God was pleased.

pleased to shew this additional instance of his mercy, have we acknowledged it in our individual capacity ? If we have not, let us profit by our former errors and delay, and seriously attend to the advice which a Prophet and a Judge once gave the nation of the Jews : “ Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth “ with all your heart ; for consider what *great things* “ he has done for you : but if ye shall *still* do “ wickedly, ye shall certainly be consumed, both ye “ and your king.”

Thus have I endeavoured plainly and seriously to “ reason with you before the Lord, on some of the “ righteous acts which the Lord has done for us,” and whereof we now rejoice. Were we to attempt to tell of *all*, “ they would be more than we should be “ able to express.” A *few* of the more general and conspicuous have therefore been selected as proper objects for our present meditation : and if the reasons offered respecting them have been rendered successful
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by the blessing of God, if they have been impressed on our hearts by his spirit, with the solemn conviction and effect their importance demands, our *gratitude*, *obedience*, and *devotion*, will be humbly offered up in return, as the most acceptable sacrifice, and the most reasonable service. And as these are what the Lord requires, and what it is our bounden duty to present, though it is but presenting unto him his own, yet he will in mercy accept them through the merits of his Son, and perpetuate the “righteous acts which he has already done to us,” to our children, and to our children’s children, even to remotest posterity: he will more signally display to us his excellent greatness in the temporal operations of his providence, and more abundantly manifest his excellent mercy and goodness in the spiritual and eternal blessings of his redemption: he will bring us into his universal kingdom, which will be inherited by the Saints of the Most High. God will then reign in us, and

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reign over us, and be to us an inexhaustible source of happiness, glory, and perfection; and in this most blessed and exalted relation he will be OUR GOD, and we shall be immutably and eternally HIS PEOPLE!!!

GRANT, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words we have this day heard with our outward ear (as far as they have been spoken agreeable to thy holy will), may be written by thy spirit inwardly in all our hearts. Grant, that as thou hast been pleased to bestow upon us the blessing of *public peace*, we may regard it as a convenient and favourable season to seek after that peace of conscience which passeth all understanding. As thou hast greatly increased our *national prosperity*, make us likewise prosperous in our spiritual and more important concerns, that we may live according to thy blessed will and word, as an holy nation and a peculiar people. As in mercy thou hast long
delighted

delighted in the *Church*, which thy right hand has planted and protected amongst us, give us grace to laud and magnify thy name therein; and to worship thee in the beauty of truth and holiness, becoming thy house for ever. And finally, as thou hast added to all thy other benefits that of a religious and gracious *King*, do thou be pleased to make his way prosperous, and give him good success: grant him a long life, and with it the constant manifestation of thy favour, which is still better than life, and its best enjoyments. With the same blessings of goodness do thou be pleased to crown his Royal Consort, our exemplary and gracious *Queen*, and all (and more especially the *elder*) branches of the Royal Family. As thou hast given the King thy judgements, impart likewise thy righteousness to the *King's Sons*: endue them with filial piety, chastity, and temperance; with all those religious sentiments and graces, which shed a splendor more illustrious than the most exalted situations, or the noblest descent: make them as mature in virtue as in years, and qualify them

them by its guidance for the execution of those high and ostensible engagements, which are necessarily connected with the existence and welfare of the government. And give us grace, as *subjects* and *citizens*, every one in his individual capacity, to stand still, and frequently reason before thee on the righteous acts which thou hast done for us and our fathers. Make us truly thankful for every one of them : give us grace to acknowledge the operations of thy hands therein, and invariably to entertain an obedient regard to thy will.

Continue, gracious Lord, these thy good things to us, and our descendants, to the end of time. Make us happy and harmonious amongst ourselves, and respectable in the eyes of the nations that surround us ; so that, being witnesses of our unexampled prosperity, they may say, Surely this is a great and understanding people, and assign as the origin and cause of all, that
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the Lord their God is with them, and the shout of a King is amongst them!

Grant us, O Lord, these and every other blessing nationally and individually that is expedient for us: grant us all the blessings of time, and the blessings of eternity; grant them through the merits and mediation of him who purchased and bestows them both, even thy blessed Son our Saviour Jesus Christ: to whom, with the Father and Eternal Spirit, three co-equal Persons in the one essential Jehovah, be ascribed, by all his reasonable creatures, glory, praise, thanksgiving, and true obedience, for ever and ever! Amen.

Page 1

The first thing I saw when I stepped out of the
train was a bright sun.

It was a warm, golden light that seemed to
welcome me. I had heard that the weather was
perfect, and now I knew it was true. The air was
clear and fresh, and the sun was shining
brightly. I had never before, and every other thing
was just what I needed. It was a beautiful
day, and I was so lucky to be here. I had
heard that the weather was perfect, and now I
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